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Viewing cable 06THEHAGUE380, DUTCH MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD AN EFFECTIVE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06THEHAGUE380	2006-02-21 11:37	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy The Hague

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/01/18/amerikanen-de-aivd-keek-neer-op-nctb/>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 THE HAGUE 000380

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2011
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: DUTCH MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD AN EFFECTIVE
COUNTER-TERRORISM REGIME, BUT WEAKNESSES REMAIN

REF: A. THE HAGUE 368

Classified By: GLOBAL ISSUES CHIEF SUSAN GARRO
FOR REASONS 1.5(B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: The GONL has taken important steps since 2001 to bolster its ability to counter terrorism. It has passed tough new legislation, revamped institutional structures, strengthened the security of critical infrastructure, and devoted substantial personnel and financial resources to the counter-terrorist (CT) effort. Still, the country remains vulnerable due to its large, alienated Muslim population, the prominent roles its armed forces have played in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the large volume of passengers and cargo passing through Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The Netherlands, traditional consensus model of government has complicated the development of an effective counter-terrorist regime. The lack of a single, identifiable authority empowered to act in the event of an attack remains a significant weakness. This cable reviews Dutch counter-terrorism efforts and highlights strengths and weaknesses. End Summary.

Public Perceptions and Political Will

12. (U) Unlike France, Spain, Britain, and other European countries that faced terrorist threats long before September 11, 2001, the Netherlands has had little such experience in recent decades. Terrorism was not even mentioned in statutes as a separate criminal offense until 2001. Since then, the Netherlands has adopted several legislative and administrative measures that permit authorities to act against suspected terrorists before they carry out an attack. The November 2004 murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a young Dutch-born Muslim extremist focused political attention on the fact that the Netherlands faces a growing threat from domestic as well as transnational terror groups. Its large Muslim population -- the second largest in western Europe in percentage terms -- is largely unassimilated and alienated, and some Muslim youth are susceptible to radicalization. Since the murder, the GONL has moved to strengthen its CT capability and to closely monitor the activities of suspected domestic terror groups.

13. (C) The most recent assessment submitted to Parliament established the threat level in the Netherlands as "substantial." This is the second highest of the four threat levels, and is defined as a "realistic threat that the Netherlands will experience a terrorist attack." According to the assessment, the threat comes primarily from domestic terrorist networks, though the role of international actors is also important. Cabinet ministers have made numerous public statements highlighting the potential for terror attacks, and urging residents to be alert to suspicious activity. Dick Schoof, Director General of Safety and Security in the Interior Ministry, told us in late 2005 that Dutch officials are working in a "nervous system," more alert than ever to threats, but also more prone to over-reaction. A blue ribbon committee tasked with advising the government on how to improve its CT organizational structure, criticized the government for reacting "hyper-sensitively" to security, and for being too focused on specific incidents; the Brinkman Committee concluded that the Netherlands was not yet adequately prepared for a terror attack or major disaster.

14. (U) Opinion polls indicate that two-thirds of the Dutch population fear a terrorist attack in the Netherlands within a year. Public responses to calls for vigilance have highlighted weaknesses in the government's preparations for handling tips from the public, including a lack of clear guidance on how or where to report threats. To redress this, the GONL is developing a national publicity campaign to raise public awareness of government's efforts to combat terrorism, and the actions the public can take to prevent it. The creation of a national call center to receive reports of suspected terrorist activity is under discussion.

¶5. (C) Public perceptions of an emerging threat have also shifted the balance between privacy -- long considered sacrosanct by the Dutch -- and security. For example, following an incident last spring at a public event in Rotterdam, the police sent SMS text messages to 17,000 mobile phones that had been present at the venue and posted photos of attendees on the internet to solicit information from bystanders. The absence of public criticism signaled a new readiness to allow authorities access to personal data for law enforcement purposes. Police ability to monitor Internet and e-mail accounts is extensive, and is used with greater frequency, with virtually no public objection.

Counter-Terrorism Structure

¶6. (U) There are three institutions with primary responsibility for counter-terrorism: the Office of the National Counter Terrorism Coordinator (NCTB), the civilian intelligence service (AIVD), and the national police (KLPD).

NCTB

¶7. (U) The NCTB became operational in January 2005. Its mandate is to coordinate all GONL counter- terrorism efforts, including setting policy and recommending legislation and resource allocations, and to facilitate cooperation between intelligence, police, and prosecutors. After the London attacks, for example, it was the NCTB that decided how the Netherlands should respond. The NCTB is also responsible for developing the periodic National Terrorist Threat Assessment. The agency has a staff of 80 drawn from Justice, Interior, Defense, Transportation, police and intelligence. It is headed by a senior civil servant, Tjibbe Joustra, who has put his strong bureaucratic skills to work to get the NCTB up and running.

¶8. (SBU) A major weaknesses is the fact that the NCTB reports to two ministers -- Justice and Interior. Despite the designation of the Justice Minister as the CT coordinating minister, with overall authority for coordinating government response in the event of an attack, the Interior Minister exercises considerable control over key elements of the government's CT tool kit, including the national police and the civilian intelligence service. The Brinkman committee recommended the merger of the Interior and Justice Ministries into one "Department of Security," or alternatively, the establishment of two new ministries, one for Security and one for Administration and Law. Given political sensitivities, government debate on the proposal has been deferred until after the 2007 national elections.

¶9. (C) The NCTB is regarded with skepticism by AIVD, the Dutch civilian intelligence service. Tensions escalated in late 2005 over accusations by the Dutch civilian and military intelligence services that NCTB is simultaneously treading too far into the intelligence field, and excluding the services from the counter-terrorism dialogue.

¶10. (C) Despite these difficulties, the NCTB has helped to strengthen Dutch counter-terrorism capabilities. It has identified weaknesses in Dutch preparedness and proposed solutions. In response to growing use of the internet for radicalization and terrorist recruitment, for example, the NCTB is developing a new cyber terrorism center, expected to be operational by March 2006. (Note: Post has requested a Science Fellow expert in Internet technology to coordinate with this center. End Note.) National Counter Terrorism Coordinator Joustra told us in January that he was satisfied with the progress so far in establishing his agency and strengthening the Netherlands' counter terrorism capacity. He said that from his perspective, the most important development in 2005 was that "nothing happened," meaning that despite the continuing threat, there had been no terrorist incidents. Joustra said that two of his priorities for 2006 were launching the public awareness campaign in February and

ensuring the effective operation of the cyber terrorism center. He noted that more work was also needed on identifying the sources of radicalization, as well as a stronger focus on finding solutions.

National Police

¶11. (C) The country's national police service (KLDP) has expanded and redirected its counter-terrorism efforts by establishing a central counter-terrorism unit at police headquarters and placing counter-terrorism experts in each of the country's 25 regional police districts. The KLPD

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reports to the Interior Minister, and is responsible for everything from highway traffic control to trafficking in persons. But KLPD chief Peter van Zunderd maintains that counter-terrorism is his top priority. The number of CT analysts assigned to the KLPD has doubled over the past year, and the KLPD is engaged with the intelligence services in preventive actions, including the closure of PKK training camps, increased surveillance of radical Dutch mosques, and the arrest of suspected members of the Hofstad group, a loosely knit Muslim extremist group. The KLPD and some regional police forces have also employed overt surveillance techniques, referred to as "disturbing," to keep tabs on key individuals and mosques believed to have radical tendencies.

¶12. (SBU) The KLPD also oversees the DKDB, the police unit assigned to protect the royal family, senior politicians and diplomats. Prior to September 11, the DKDB focused primarily on the royal family, while the Prime Minister and other ministers often walked or rode bicycles to work unaccompanied. That has changed. The DKDB now provides close protection to several ministers, at least two parliamentarians who have been threatened by Muslim extremists, and a number of diplomats, including the U.S. Chief of Mission and the Consul General in Amsterdam. DKDB staff has more than doubled in recent years, from 200 to 450. A confidential proposal by the Justice Minister, leaked to the press in October 2005, calls for all Dutch Parliamentarians and other VIPs to be included on a national list of high-risk persons and buildings to receive special protection.

¶13. (U) The Special Interventions Unit was established in June 2005 to bring together special police and military units to respond rapidly to terrorist incidents. The new unit was prominently and successfully deployed in the October 14 arrests of seven members of the Hofstad group believed to be preparing imminent attacks on Dutch politicians and government buildings.

Civilian Intelligence Service

¶14. (C) Like the national police, the AIVD intelligence agency has sharpened its focus on counter-terrorism since 2001. Roughly 80 percent of the AIVD's growing resources are now devoted to counter-terrorism. The current staff of 1,100 is due to be increased to 1,500 over the next several years. The service regularly monitors activities at several mosques in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and other major cities, cautions Muslim clerics who foment radicalization, and provides evidence that can be used for deportation of radical clerics. Three foreign-born imams accused of promoting the radicalization of Dutch Muslims were expelled in 2005 after losing deportation appeals. AIVD has done a credible job identifying and monitoring radical organizations, including the Hofstad Group.

Structural Weaknesses

¶15. (C) Despite devoting greater attention and resources to both the police and intelligence services, shortcomings are still evident. In particular, coordination continues to be

problematic. An interagency information sharing center, known as the "info box," established to facilitate information sharing among the police, intelligence services, the national prosecutor's office and the immigration service has been criticized by some police officials as ineffective. While KLPD Chief van Zunderd hails the mechanism as a significant advance, other Embassy police contacts have complained that the "info box" is more like a "black hole," and that information flows in only one direction, from the police to the AIVD. Some Interior Ministry officials complain that regional police forces do not share information readily with each other or with the KLPD. Nevertheless, many counter-terrorism experts agree with politicians and senior police officials that information exchange between the services has improved. The coordinated arrests of Hofstad group suspects in mid-October provided an indication of improved coordination between the KLPD, AIVD and the Public Prosecutor's office, all of whom had been monitoring the activities of the group.

¶16. (SBU) Dutch authorities have also been plagued by the failure to retain in custody a number of prominent terrorist suspects detained by the police. For example, alleged Hofstad group leader Samir Azzouz was acquitted in April on charges of plotting attacks on government buildings in 2004, because the prosecution was unable to produce sufficient evidence of "terrorist intent." His acquittal was upheld on appeal in November. Azzouz was rearrested on October 14, along with six other alleged Hofstad group members, on charges of planning attacks on Dutch politicians and government buildings. Two of those arrested have been released pending trial, reportedly due to insufficient evidence to keep them in preventive custody. Prosecutors have expressed confidence that they will be able to win a conviction this time against Azzouz, who will be tried under the provisions of the tougher 2004 law that made membership in a terrorist organization a criminal offence. Additional proposed legislation (ref c) is expected to address some, but not all of the weaknesses in the GONL's ability to successfully prosecute terrorist suspects.

Comment

¶17. (C) The Dutch have made significant progress toward constructing an effective counter-terrorism regime. The recognition, inside and outside the government, that the Netherlands is vulnerable to a terrorist attack has generated political and societal support for the institutional changes and resource allocation needed to strengthen the government's capacity to combat the threat.

¶18. (C) Despite the progress, weaknesses remain. Chief among these is the absence of clear lines of authority. Government decision-making on CT issues is slow and cumbersome, with occasional public disagreements within the governing coalition about policy priorities. Coordination among the various government entities with counter- terrorism and public security responsibilities is problematic. The nascent information sharing mechanisms between intelligence and police services need strengthening. Additionally, the Netherlands needs to make significantly more progress on integrating its large and largely alienated Muslim population to substantially reduce the threat of radicalization and home-grown terror attacks.

BLAKEMAN